

Montana VR Council Meeting Minutes May 15-16, 2006

Vocational Rehabilitation Council

May 15-16, 2006

Wilderness Room Helena, MT

Members present: Don Jones (Monday), Jim Daily, Wanyne Nankivel, David Boyd, Carol Lambert, Sharla LaFountain, Dan Burke, Michelle Williamson, Faith Dawson, Denise Corrao, Ron Mills, Dennis Moore, Ruth Straley, Dick Trerise, Claudette Vance, Arlene Templer, Jackie Colombe (Tuesday)

Members absent: Kermit Horn, Paul Pearson

Staff and guests present: Peggy Williams, Joe Mathews, Barbara Varnum, Brigitte Winfield, Beverly Berg, Sue Anderson (Monday), Scott Williamson, Donna Harris (Monday), Pam Watson (Tuesday), Barb Kriskovich (Tuesday), Connie Phelps (Tuesday)

Monday, May 15, 2006

Arlene called the meeting to order at 10:00, and members introduced themselves.

Announcements and Updates

- Maureen Kenneally will be a new member on the Council representing the State Workforce Investment Board. She replaces Dan Miles.
- Arlene will contact the Native American Section 121 VR Projects to come to our next Council meeting at Fort Belknap. We will try to have a panel to talk about their projects.
- Carol Lambert talked about the Statewide Independent Living Council activities. They are having a symposium for consumers in Missoula August 22 – 24. They wrote a letter protesting the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant changes that the Department of Public Health and Human Services made.

Report on CSAVR Meeting

Arlene reported on the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation meeting recently held in Washington, DC. Arlene, Peggy and Joe attended the meeting which had breakout sessions for state rehabilitation councils. Arlene and Joe took information on the Montana VR program to the Montana congressional offices. The state rehabilitation councils would like to form a national network to promote VR issues and to become more autonomous from the states. The VR federal partner, Rehabilitation Services Administration, is looking at sponsoring a national meeting for state rehabilitation council representatives sometime in the next 2 years.

The Big Picture

Joe Mathews talked about happenings on the federal and state levels. On the federal level, Congress will probably not pass the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (which includes the Rehabilitation Act) this year. The House did pass a version, and the Senate is working on a version. There is a holdup related to faith-based organizations. If the reauthorization is not done this year, then it starts over. Even though the Rehabilitation Act has not been reauthorized, Vocational Rehabilitation is entitled to a Cost of Living Adjustment. Congress is currently looking at a 4% increase for next year. However, Montana may not get that much, because there is a complicated formula for distribution of that increase to the states.

Joe also discussed the closing of the federal regional offices. Montana used to be served by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) staff in Denver and Dallas. Last fall the federal government closed all those regional offices, and laid off most of the employees. Now, everything is run from Washington, DC. RSA will be doing a lot of state review on paper, rather than in person. Charles Sadler, our new federal representative, will visit Montana the week of July 31. VR will take him out to Miles City to visit a rural VR office.

Joe also mentioned the National Employment Network, which has been started by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). This organization helps state VR agencies to provide a more seamless system to assist employers with their disability employment needs.

VR submitted its state plan and used the public hearing input for part of that plan. VR is looking for a better way to do the public hearing, because it appears that much of the public hearing is orchestrated by certain interest groups. Wayne had some ideas, and he is willing to work with VR to make the process better.

On the state side, Montana has a budget surplus. However, the Governor's office is concerned that it isn't sustainable. VR is putting together priorities for the next Legislature—January 2007. First, the program puts together its priorities, then the department prioritizes those needs for the entire department, then the Governor's office reviews them and decides whether to include them in the Governor's budget. VR has asked for full match for the program, tuition increases to meet the university system increases, rate increases for providers, an additional counselor and support staff for western Montana, annualized funding for extended employment, and continued funding for the Montana Youth Leadership Forum.

Joe also talked about Order of Selection. If a VR agency does not have enough money to serve all eligible people, then the agency must prioritize who gets services. The federal law says that a state must continue to serve its existing consumers and then serve the most significantly disabled; only if there is enough money, should the agency serve people who are not quite as disabled. Over half of the state VR agencies across the country are in Order of Selection. Joe stated that VR needs to be able to predict the need for Order of Selection about nine months before it needs to see results from

that process. Workforce centers should be able to help with some of the less intensively disabled consumers.

Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia (WROCC)

Faith talked about WROCC which provides technical assistance in the area of deafness and hard of hearing services. WROCC concentrates primarily on four areas that help ensure deaf and hard of hearing students are getting their needs met in postsecondary educational settings: technical assistance; training; resource center; regional and national collaboration. Mary Morrison is the project director, and people are invited to contact her for specific information and training needs.

Native American Section 121 Update

Quintin Kingfisher talked about the Section 121 Native American VR project on Northern Cheyenne. This is a new project, and Quintin is just getting things started. Northern Cheyenne had a similar project during 1991 through 1993. He mentioned that starting up is hard—he still needs to get office space. He has met with a number of people to get advice. He already has five clients who are transferring from state services.

Public Hearing Comments

Barbara Varnum briefly discussed the public hearing comments. This year, 63 people came to the public hearing. Last year VR mailed out about 3,000 more invitations--- sending them out to active consumers. However, the number of people attending the hearing remained the same when these notices were not sent out this year. There were a lot of public hearing comments on the Montana Youth Leadership Forum.

Ticket to Work

Barbara Varnum reviewed the Ticket to Work program from Social Security. Social Security recipients are given a “ticket” which they can use for services from any approved employment network. In Montana there are 11 employment networks other than Montana Vocational Rehabilitation. However, only 7 Social Security recipients have given those other employment networks their ticket. On the other hand, Montana Vocational Rehabilitation has received 401 tickets. One of the problems facing employment networks other than Vocational Rehabilitation is that the other employment networks do not receive any funding for providing services to the ticket holder until after the ticket holder goes to work at a certain wage level. Montana Vocational Rehabilitation receives funding from the state up front to provide services, and then is reimbursed by Social Security later. Social Security is looking at the reimbursement process to make it more friendly to other employment networks.

Strategic Plan

Peggy discussed the VR strategic plan that is being developed. VR Council representatives met with VR management staff in December to start the process. The Council suggested that next time the goals be separated into categories: necessary, stretch, and excel. The plan has 8 goals:

- Facilitate legislative education and awareness of our issues and work.
- Promote public education and awareness.
- Provide the best possible services to consumers.
- Provide and develop more opportunities for transportation for people with disabilities; assist with and coordinate other efforts.
- Ensure the high quality administration and functioning of the VR program and ensure good accountability.
- Ensure adequate funding.
- Implement, improve, and streamline the case management system.
- Encourage, develop, and promote the staff's professional development.

The plan will be reviewed with the Council and VR regional administrators quarterly.

How to talk to Legislators

Carol presented information on how to get to know and talk to your legislator. She stressed that one hand written letter equals ten form letters. It is important to get to know legislators on a personal level and to educate them on your issues. The first step is to contact your legislator (letter, phone, email) and talk to them one on one. You can then educate them on your subject. Be sure to treat them with the respect their title demands. During the session, send them emails to keep your subject on their mind.

Kurzweil NFB Reader

Dan demonstrated the Kurzweil Reader. This is a portable device that can take a picture of written (typed) material and read it back out loud.

Business Enterprise Program

Dan talked about the Business Enterprise Program which is run by Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind and Low Vision Services) and allows people who are blind or visually impaired to operate vending routes on state and federal property. Actually VR contracts with Montana Business Enterprise, Inc. to run the program. This program is authorized in both federal and state law, and currently there are four vendors working. The original idea was that the program would become self sufficient over time, but that hasn't happened yet. The program is working to expand routes and investigate areas such as post offices, interstate rest areas, and Malmstrom Air Force Base. Dan stated that the program needs more money for administrative costs.

Older Blind Proposed Rules

Beverly Berg discussed the proposed administrative rules for the Older Blind program. There are currently no rules, and the new rules address four areas: definitions,

eligibility, scope of services, and fair hearings. Beverly is not anticipating any problems getting these rules through the administrative rule process.

Field Services Update

Joe gave an update of VR field issues for Bob Jahner. VR is changing the timelines for developing an employment plan with consumers---instead of a deadline of 180 days, the deadline will be 120 days. In the area of presumptive eligibility (if a consumer is on SSI or SSDI, he is 'presumed' to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services), VR is working to make sure that all counselors understand the concept. In the area of self employment, VR is considering language that would allow for exceptions to the policy without losing the effectiveness of the original limitations.

The meeting was adjourned for the day.

Tuesday, May 16

Committee Reports

See the appendices for the committee reports.

Medicaid Buy In

Barb Kriskovich discussed the status of the state's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. The grant will look at how (and if) Montana could implement the Medicaid Buy In program. Medicaid Buy In would allow people with disabilities to work and keep their Medicaid benefits by paying a premium. Currently, many jobs do not have adequate insurance benefits for their employees.

The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant subcontracts with the Rural Institute and Summit Independent Living Center to survey work issues and barriers, conduct an outreach campaign with presentations and focus groups. The grant will also work with the Native American community.

When the state got the grant, the federal government stated that the grant application needed strengthening and asked for changes. The state did write some amendments to the grant which did away with some of the involvement of people with disabilities. Barb stated that the previous week, she, Joe Mathews and Joyce DeCunzo met with Summit Independent Living Center and the Rural Institute and put many of those activities back into the grant.

Carol moved that the Council write a letter to Joe Mathews stating that the input of people with disabilities is critical and encouraging the department to continue including people with disabilities in planning, developing and implementing this grant. The motion passed.

Montana Telecommunications Access Program (MTAP)

Connie Phelps, MTAP director, demonstrated the equipment that MTAP distributes to Montanans who are deaf or hard of hearing. She showed amplified phones, captioned telephones (CapTel), Text Telephones (TTY), and loud ringers. She also discussed the relay which is used when a hearing person wants to talk to a deaf person. MTAP equipment services are free to Montanans with hearing disabilities who meet certain income requirements.

Workforce Update

Pam Watson, staff person to the State Workforce Investment Board, handed out the board's newsletter. She stated that one of the board's priorities is healthcare, and the board has established a healthcare taskforce to address current and future healthcare workforce shortages in Montana. She also mentioned the Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant that Montana received that affects 32 counties in eastern Montana.

Pam also mentioned the workforce transition to a single planning area which reduced the number of boards from 3 to 1. As a result of this consolidation, \$1.2 million will be available for reallocation.

Pam is taking a new job, and Lisa Smith will take over her current duties.

VR Reports

Peggy handed out the reports that VR submits to the federal government. VR is required to share these reports with the Council each year, and Montana VR does this in the spring meeting. The reports cover financial areas, types of services provided, number and type (applicant, receiving services, employed) of people served, independent living services, and client appeals. In addition to the written reports that Montana VR submits, a computer data report is submitted on all closed cases that includes all the information that VR collects on each of the closed cases.

Standards and Indicators

Peggy handed out a copy of the federal Standards and Indicators that Montana must meet each year. In order to "pass", VR must meet most of the indicators. In 2005, Montana met ALL of the indicators.

Agenda Items for July Meeting

Section 121 Panel

Cultural Training

Include Mavis

Invite Havre VR workers
Ask Anna Whiting Sorrelto come
Report on Native American Brain Injury Conference
Transportation Update—MDT
Executive Planning Process Update
Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
Meth issue

The meeting was adjourned.

Appendix A
Public Relations Committee Minutes
May 16, 2006

The Statewide Independent Living Council symposium will be August 22-24 in Missoula, and Carol will talk about working with the Legislature.

We will promote the Public Hearings with more detail in the mailings. We will be more specific about what we need to hear from the public.

We will be sending somebody to appear on the "Community Pulse" program to talk about transportation issues. Peggy will ask Marlene to be the speaker. Ruth will contact the program to set the date and time.

We will continue our on-going PR strategies such as; mailing information to the "Friends of Rehab," and discussing VR with others, in order to, promote it by word of mouth.

We will be placing brochures in offices around town. Literature will be mailed to Denise and Claudette, so they may distribute in their areas. Anyone may request information to do the same.

Appendix B
Native American Committee
May 16, 2006

1. Hold the summer Council meeting in Fort Belknap in conjunction with the Milk River Days, July 26-28. Do cultural training for the Council and staff, and cultural immersion on the Thursday night of the meeting. *Plans are well underway for the July meeting in Fort Belknap. David reserved a block of rooms (22) at the Chinook Inn. Peggy confirmed the reservation in January. Mavis Young Bear is providing a catered lunch for the Council. Arlene Templer stated that Anna Sorrel-Whiting is interested in attending the July meeting. Arlene will contact Anna to verify her attendance. As the meeting will be held during Milk River Days, there will be plenty of opportunity for cultural immersion. Arlene suggested that the cultural training should include the "dos and don'ts" of conduct at the Pow Wow. The entire Council is looking forward to the meeting this summer.*
2. Contact the Crow Agency to discuss the possibility of them applying for the 121 grant. *Arlene Templer agreed to contact this agency.*
3. Invite the 121's to the July Council meeting in Fort Belknap. Have a panel of 121 representative speakers. Focus on the subject of 121 issues. *At our last Council meeting, Mavis Young Bear stated that she would contact the 121 projects regarding the July meeting. Barbara will contact Mavis regarding her progress.*
4. Encourage VR representatives to attend the Consortia of Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR) *Barbara Varnum, MVR 121 liaison, will attend the mid-year CANAR conference in Green Bay, WI this spring. Depending on funding, one MVR counselor who provides services on a reservation will attend the annual meeting, which is typically held in the fall, in Seattle.*
5. Send a MVR representative and MVR Council member to the Native American Brain Injury Association Conference in June. *Last year, a number of counselors attended the NA Brain Injury Conference in Billings. This year, MVR has already sent out a notice to all MVR counselors regarding the conference. The conference is scheduled for June 6 & 7 in Billings.*
6. NA Committee meet the 121 representatives to discuss public awareness and what their needs are. *The committee will meet with the 121 representatives that attend the July council meeting in Fort Belknap.*
7. Maintain communication with the 121 Projects. *This will be an on-going goal for this committee. Barbara Varnum currently serves as the 121 Project liaison for MVR.*

Appendix C
Transition Committee
May 16, 2006

Minutes not available.